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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SURINAME'S REACTION TO THE SUMMIT OF AMERICAS  
CONFERENCE, FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS AND PETROCARIBE

11. (U) Commenting on the Summit of the Americas (SOA) on his return from Argentina, Surinamese President Venetiaan remarked that for the first time, the final declaration included consideration of the position of small countries with weak and vulnerable economies, such as those of the CARICOM member states. He characterized this inclusion, supported by the U.S., Canada and Mexico, as a victory for CARICOM. Venetiaan described the atmosphere during the Summit as tense and controversial, and noted that Venezuelan President Chavez was out to undermine support for FTAA. Venetiaan added that he favors resumption of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations in early 2006. He lamented that while the EU continues to build a much stronger trade block, the Americas are still fighting over which direction trade integration should follow. He observed that small economies have less luxury to engage in debate that delays successful integration than countries with large domestic markets like Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina.

12. (SBU) In a meeting last week with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lygia Kraag-Keteldijk, the Ambassador again heard of Suriname's satisfaction that the final declaration of the SOA included consideration of smaller economies. On the topic of PetroCaribe, the Minister remarked that although Suriname had signed a "framework" document with Venezuela, it had not yet negotiated a final bilateral agreement under which specific commitments and responsibilities were enumerated. Ambassador attempted to engage the Minister on how the PetroCaribe agreement could limit the number of suppliers of gasoline available to Suriname, but the Minister maintained that the agreement would not limit Suriname's choice of suppliers in any manner. The Minister recognized that the agreement was mainly a "financial facility" and with a degree of reluctance agreed with Ambassador Barnes's assertion that it would mean greater indebtedness for Suriname.

13. (SBU) Comment: The Minister's remarks suggest that Suriname harbors a perhaps overly optimistic assessment of the cost and benefit balance of the PetroCaribe agreement. But in any case, against a backdrop of apparent active Surinamese interest in PetroCaribe and Venezuelan overtures generally, we find President Venetiaan's take on trade integration trends interesting. His comments in favor of FTAA, casting the trade interests of small and large Latin American countries as divergent, would appear to put Suriname in opposition to the Venezuelan position on the FTAA/Mercosur divide. End comment.

BARNES

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